

Cabrera Asserts Politics Ruled Border Conference

Mexican Chairman Gives Tribune Resume of Deliberations—Says Action Depended on Election—Pershing's Recall, His Chief Object, Accomplished.

Why the recently dissolved Mexican-American Joint Commission failed, after nearly five months of conferences, to settle the differences between First Chief Carranza and the United States is told in the following article, which was dictated exclusively to a representative of The Tribune by Luis Cabrera, chairman of the Mexican section of the commission and Minister of Finance in Carranza's Cabinet.

Secretary Lane, the American chairman, the Mexicans found, "applied a political criterion in every question," while Judge Gray judged everything from the legal point of view. Commissioner Mott was esteemed as a "liberal cosmopolitan."

By LUIS CABRERA

To understand the difficulties under which the joint commission had to work and properly to appreciate the results that were obtained it is necessary to recall the Mexican situation as it was at the time the commission convened. Villa had just made a murderous raid on Columbus, N. M. Public indignation was aroused in the United States and the United States government had sent a punitive expedition into Mexican territory without having obtained the permission of the Mexican government and without having notified that government of its intentions.

Although assurances were given later that the action of the United States government in dispatching the punitive expedition was not intended to be in violation of the sovereignty of Mexico, the fact was that the presence of an American army in Mexico for an indefinite period and the unlimited pursuit of Villa's bands in Mexican territory was a cause of friction between both countries and brought a situation full of dangers. This was clearly shown in the incidents at Parí and Carrizal, incidents which were unavoidable so long as the American army extended its operations in Mexico.

Incidents which had brought a very serious crisis. When the Mexican commission left Mexico it seemed that a break between Mexico and the United States was more than a possibility. Many feared such a break was imminent.

The Mexican commissioners had four objects in view when they reached New London. These objects were:

First—To plead for the withdrawal of the American troops operating in Mexico.

Second—To discuss any reasonable means for the protection of the border by the cooperation of both governments.

Third—To negotiate an agreement under which the pursuit of bandits should be conducted in the future on the basis of mutual concessions and limitations as to the force employed and the time and extension of operations.

Fourth—To listen to any suggestions made by the American commission for a better understanding between the two governments, all within the limits of international law.

The most important thing for us, of

course, was to obtain the withdrawal of the American forces since their presence in Mexico was, according to our feelings, a continued violation of Mexican rights.

As to the second point, First Chief Carranza believed that the protection of the border should be consummated by the cooperation of both governments. He was convinced that no plan would succeed in bringing order in that section unless steps were taken to prevent armed bands of Mexicans taking refuge on the American side, getting arms and ammunition, and then crossing again into Mexico to organize and raid villages and towns on both sides of the line. The Carranza government was convinced that only by a strict enforcement of neutrality along the border could the disorder be remedied and, of course, for that purpose international agreement was necessary.

The third point also was important from the Mexican point of view. The Carranza government recognized that there was a peculiarly dangerous situation on the border which required extraordinary measures. It realized also that raids made on American towns by border bandits would require quick repressive measures. That such situations had been remedied in the past only by prompt and active pursuit of hands across the border was well known, but the Carranza government would not admit that such situations gave the United States the right to send large forces into Mexico to occupy, in a military way, towns and villages; to establish bases therein and to proceed into the interior, far beyond the threatened points.

It was important, therefore, that a treaty should be negotiated, providing for such emergencies and stating clearly the limitations upon which pursuit should be made. Such a treaty could not be negotiated except on the basis of reciprocity.

The Carranza government was willing to listen to any suggestions intended to make possible a better understanding between both countries, but it was not willing to depart from international law.

Such, in brief, were the instructions given by First Chief Carranza to his representatives.

American Plan Found Difficult

When the Mexican commissioners arrived in New London they were prepared to develop that programme. But they found that the Americans had a different plan in mind, and it was necessary, first, to agree upon the points that should be discussed at the conference. Unfortunately, the programmes of both groups of delegates were so far apart that practically all the time spent in New London was taken up by efforts to agree about the scope of the discussion, without succeeding in finding a common ground to work on.

Then the conference was transferred to Atlantic City. At that time the American Presidential election was near, and as the commission had no full power to negotiate and sign a protocol, but all its decisions and agreements were to be ratified by the respective governments, it was believed that the best thing to do was to wait until the election was over, lest the work of the commission should be useless in case of the defeat of President Wilson for reelection. Thus the commission at Atlantic City merely marked time until the election was over.

The conference was then transferred to Philadelphia and the commissioners set to work. They discovered soon that their views were entirely different in regard to the last three points, and, failing to find a common ground as to them, they decided to draw a tentative agreement covering only the withdrawal of the American expedition. This agreement was signed subject to ratification.

The text of the agreement has been published and it shows that the withdrawal was made conditional. The Mexican commissioners signed it only after repeatedly expressing their opinion that it could hardly be accepted by Carranza. They wanted to show their willingness to cooperate in finding a solution for the international troubles affecting Mexico and the United States.

There was no secret agreement attached to the protocol, notwithstanding all the published reports to the contrary. There was only an oral agreement that if the protocol were ratified the commissioners would discuss other measures intended to strengthen the friendship and promote the good relations between both countries. To make matters worse a supplementary statement was published in the newspapers, attributed to Secretary Lane, head of the American commission, which practically nullified, according to the Mexican view, all previous assurances given about the intention of the United States government to respect Mexico's sovereignty. Under the circumstances the protocol was not accepted by Carranza, and the whole matter was placed again in the hands of both governments that they might try to adjust the differences by direct diplomatic means.

Analyzes American Conference

The work of the commission, however, was not entirely lost. It succeeded in two main things. The first was to bring about a frank and sincere discussion of the situation and to allow the matter to cool sufficiently to allow both governments to be in a position to determine calmly and without prejudice the most reasonable way to solve the whole matter. It also had the effect of convincing the American government that the present expedition, having fulfilled its object and having stayed in Mexico for many weeks without purpose, should be recalled, as the large force under General Pershing could be of much more use along the border line than in Mexican territory.

Our impression of the American commissioners was favorable. We found them to be fair and clear-minded and well informed about the situation. Their attitude was frank and sincere. From the beginning they were as willing and earnest as we were to find a permanent solution.

The American commissioners were all three kind and attentive, and, of course, each one had his own personal ally. Of Judge Gray we had the impression that he had mainly a legal mind—that is to say, that he judged all the matters considered mainly from the legal point of view, and his opinions were marked by his great ability as a jurist. Of Dr. Mott we had the impression that he had the most liberal and cosmopolitan mind and saw the facts in a cosmopolitan and international way.

Secretary Lane, whose opinions, he being the head of the American commission, prevailed, has a political mind and he applied a political criterion to every question. His views were accurately adjusted to the needs of the internal political situation in the United States.

We observed that the American commissioners were highly sensible to public opinion and feeling as expressed by the American press. The influence of the newspaper attitude was manifested from day to day, and this was more noticeable at times of high political tension—that is, on the eve of one of the most closely contested Presidential elections. It can be said that the way the tide of public sentiment turned from day to day was reflected in the state of mind of the American commissioners.

Although not a single word was said about it in the whole discussion of the conferences, we had the unmistakable impression that in the mind of the American government the belief has crystallized that some sort of Platt amendment would be the best solution of the Mexican trouble.

But would this solution ever appeal to Mexico?

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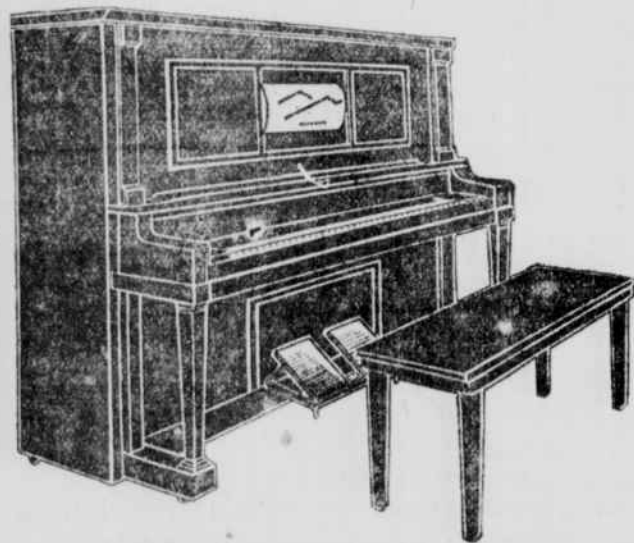
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